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# Senate blocks attempt to curtail covert acts

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WASHINGTON — The Senate killed two amendments Saturday that would have barred U.S. funding for U.S. covert operations in Central America.

"This vote was a victory for the CIA," said Sen. Christopher Dodd (D., Conn.), whose amendment was one of two simultaneously voted down 56-38 by the Senate. "This is a green light to the CIA, a message that it's OK to overthrow the Sandinistas."

However, conservative senators led by Jesse Helms (R., N.C.), said the vote was a move to shut off debate on what they characterized as "sensitive intelligence activities" in Central America and as a way to prevent "tying the administration's hands."

"We are playing with fire here," said Helms during the heated debate over the amendments offered to a stopgap funding bill by Dodd and by Sens. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D., N.Y.) and John Chafee (R., R.I.), both members of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

"We are about to lose Latin America. We are about to lose democracies in Central America, and for us to take up a sensitive foreign policy issue at this time is wrong," said Helms.

"We are also tying the hands of the administration by parading these issues on the Senate floor when they should be dealt with in the intelligence committees."

Debate erupted when Dodd, a critic of President Reagan's policies in Central America, presented an amendment that would ban the use of U.S. government funds to "support irregular military forces or paramilitary groups operating in Central America."

Moynihan and Chafee immedi-

ately proposed a substitute amendment that sought to bar U.S. funds for "any action directed at the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government or to trigger a war between Nicaragua and Honduras," wording identical to legislation approved by the House earlier in the week.

Dodd said the Moynihan-Chafee amendment had so many loopholes that "a truck could drive through them." He said it would still allow funding of paramilitary groups for "whatever clandestine operation we have going in the region." He said his own amendment was designed to prevent the United States from "being unwittingly drawn into a broad conflict in Central America."

But Moynihan and Chafee, who said their amendment was backed by the administration, said that the Dodd amendment would interfere with legitimate U.S. intelligence activities in Central America.

"The Dodd amendment is an extreme injunction, a Draconian injunction on U.S. activities," said Chafee. "Never before have we had such an injunction. Do we want to tie the President's hands in this fashion?"

Moynihan said he opposed the Dodd amendment because it indicated a lack of confidence in the oversight powers of the congressional intelligence committees to prevent abuses.

"In the committees, we have given the intelligence community very explicit instructions as to what they may or may not do in Central America," said Moynihan. He did not say what the instructions were. But, he added, "this Senate can rest assured that we in the intelligence committees are a shield to prevent abuses or misjudgments by the intelligence communities."

At this point, Helms objected to the discussion and engaged in a direct debate with Dodd.

"We can't tolerate a war in Central America," said Dodd. "Mark my words. Soon we will be back on this Senate floor asking ourselves how we allowed the United States to be drawn into a war down there."

"Mark my words, senator," Helms replied. "What your amendment does is to prop up the Sandinistas to do the dirty work for Cuba and Fidel Castro in Central America."

"Is it, then, that you support U.S. backing for the anti-Sandinistas counterinsurgents?" Dodd asked.

"All I'm saying is 'don't tie the President's hands,'" responded Helms, who then moved to table both the Dodd and Moynihan-Chafee amendments, which the Senate voted to do by the 56-38 vote.

There is still a slim chance, however, that some action will be taken banning funds for paramilitary activities in Central America.

The amendment approved 411-0 by the House is now part of the House version of the so-called continuing resolution, the stopgap bill to provide operating funds for government agencies.

The Senate version of the continuing resolution is expected to go to a House-Senate conference today, where the Central American issue again will come up when both sides try to reconcile the legislation.